



County Executive Scott Walker
2008 Budget Address
September 27, 2007

Chairman Holloway, members of the County Board, Sheriff Clarke, Treasurer Diliberti, Clerk Ryan, fellow citizens of Milwaukee County: thank you for the opportunity to address you here today. At this time, I want to acknowledge the ten employees of Milwaukee County who are currently on military leave due to activation with our Armed Forces. They, and their families and loved ones, are in our thoughts and prayers.

The son of Domingo Leguizamon, Eric, is here with us today and I want to, once again, extend my thanks to you and to all of the other families and loved ones for your courage and dedication. We salute you.

Today I want to shift my focus from the mechanics of county government and look instead at the potential of this great county. I believe that we can make Milwaukee County even greater by working to improve three things: safety, affordability and pride.

My quest these past five years does not end in wanting to hold the line on taxes. Instead, it begins with holding the line on taxes and then reallocating the budget to spend less on our government, and more on improving our community.

Safety. Affordability. And Pride.

If we don't feel safe in our community, we have lost our freedom. The freedom to sit out on our porches or let our children play in our front yards. The freedom to send our kids to school without the fear of them getting shot. The freedom to enjoy all Milwaukee County has to offer during the day and after dark...along the lake or in the city...in a park or at home. We need to be vigilant in creating a Milwaukee County that is free of fear. A Milwaukee County where we all feel safe.

Without a sense of security, nothing else matters. That is why – in this budget – I make public safety a priority. Even with our fiscal challenges, we give the Sheriff the resources needed to protect our parks and buses and to address violent crime in the City of Milwaukee and beyond. We invest to continue the successful reclaiming of the lakefront.

We put more into programs that keep our young people out of a cycle of crime. We do more to supervise offenders and not just watch them sleep at night. And we preserve one of the best paramedic programs in the country and provide it with advanced equipment to save more lives.

I want to publicly thank Sheriff David Clarke for his leadership on this initiative and say that we are ready to stand with you and your deputies to make this county even safer.

Safety. Affordability. And Pride.

Do you realize that if taxes continued to go up at the same rate as they did before I got here we would be paying \$43.9 million more in taxes this year? As I've said before, we cannot ask the taxpayers to pay for the pension excesses of the past.

On Tuesday, former state Commerce Secretary Cory Nettles noted that many of the companies coming into Wisconsin identified taxes as being too high. If we want to create an environment for more jobs in our state and in our county, we have to make it affordable for them to be here.

The same goes for local taxpayers. The sad reality is that many people who made their living and raised their families in Milwaukee are being forced to move, because they can't afford to pay the taxes anymore. We owe it to the generation that built Milwaukee County and all that follow to do everything in our power to make this a place they can raise their children, watch their grandchildren grow and live out their days without ever having to think of leaving.

This budget was created so that the retired couple living on Social Security... the new homeowners with a baby ... the entrepreneur just branching out to start a new business... could make a go of it here. This is why we do not raise the tax levy. And it's also why I don't support adding to our overall tax burden with a new sales tax.

Safety. Affordability. And Pride.

We have a lot to be proud of, but I have so much more hope for what we can accomplish in the future.

I hold out hope for an integrated transportation system. We invest in our bridges, roads and parkways. We maintain our bus routes and our ParaTransit service and we continue to provide discounts for frequent riders and subsidies for seniors, students and people with disabilities.

On another transportation issue, we continue to grow our airport as it is our front door into the region. In 2006 over 7.3 million passengers came through Mitchell International Airport. That record will be broken in 2007. That gives me hope that Milwaukee's economic engine is revving.

If you listen closely, you can hear the sound of that engine throughout the county. Last year, we had more than \$1.1 billion worth of new construction in our county and with all of the cranes popping up, we are on pace to hit that mark again this year. We also hope to break ground for the UWM School of Engineering on the county grounds. We will consolidate our resources to help provide better housing options for those with mental illness. And we will transform our assets into new projects that produce jobs.

But creating pride is more than just creating jobs. Hope for the future also comes in the form of a safety net for those in need. We continue to provide a managed care system of health care for low-income individuals. We'll grow our program to provide long-term care for older adults and look to expand FamilyCare to people with disabilities under the age of 60 so we can ultimately eliminate the waiting lists for services. And we improve care for people with mental illness.

Community pride comes from the things that make us unique. We'll improve our zoo through a powerful partnership with the Zoological Society of Milwaukee and the benefits of some \$30 million of capital investments. We add at least 15,000 more hours of work and new equipment for the care of our parks and we move forward with an aggressive new aquatics plan, new playground equipment and new additions to the Domes and the lakefront. And despite our budget challenges, we'll continue support for our cultural institutions.

And I hold out hope that we can rebuild pride by instituting a long-term plan of reform and good management. We add more financial oversight, propose a solid Pension Obligation Bond program, begin a master space plan and embark on a long-term strategic planning process.

We pursue energy efficiency and promote environmental sustainability. And I firmly support a stronger ethics code to reaffirm the public's trust in county government.

I want to thank Supervisor Joe Rice and the other committee members for their work on a new ethics code.

Safety. Affordability. And Pride. And realistically, one more word...challenges.

The biggest challenge we face is wrestling with the burden of our legacy costs. In 2007, we were able to cap the lump sum backdrop benefit for the final group of employees. Working with the members of the County Board, we will continue to push our lawsuit against the county's and pension systems' former actuary to recover damages arising out of the 2000 pension changes.

Voluntary agreements this past year with the majority of our unions helped dramatically drop the projected increase in health care costs. Now, we look to fully implement a wellness and disease management program to further drive down those costs.

Overtime is a major issue – particularly at the House of Correction and the Mental Health Complex. In this budget, we add a new initiative to improve the recruitment of key employees and the management of overtime. Our challenge is not from the lack of funded positions, but in the difficulty in filling those positions.

Debt service costs from the past continue to drain the budget. In turn, I present a capital budget that meets our previous target of a \$30 million cap on all bonded projects. This will help us manage the costs of paying off debt in the future.

Finally, we have the challenge of state government. Certainly, the uncertainty about a state budget is a problem for us and all other local governments. With this in mind, we tried to be realistic in our projections for what may or may not be in the state budget.

Still, the reality is that the state is sticking it to Milwaukee County.

Take the costs of holding a juvenile sentenced into the state system as an example. In every version of the budget (from the Governor's to the Joint Finance Committee; from the Senate to the Assembly to the Conference Committee), all of them jack up the rates some 22%.

Holding a young person in the state system will now cost \$97,820 per year. This is enough to send more than 19 kids to UWM for a year. This is wrong.

Years ago, a former Governor called local government officials big spenders, but it seems that the opposite is true today. Seven years ago, the average daily population at state juvenile institutions was 1,439. Earlier this year, the count was down to 795. Amazingly, the state has taken little or no action to reduce the overhead costs of running these institutions. So who are the true big spenders? We need the state to cut costs and then lower the rates. Anything less is just a state tax increase on local taxpayers.

Here is another example. State government requires the county to hire staff to determine eligibility for food stamps, childcare and Medicaid. There is no choice as this is a state mandate.

Yet over the past four years, the Governor and the members of the State Legislature have backed away from covering the costs of these programs to the tune of \$2.4 million. Now, to meet yet another state mandate, we have to take property tax levy from other programs and pour it into this area. It is time for the state to cover the costs of these mandates or eliminate them, period.

As you can see, we have our hands full with the state. Still, whether it is the state budget or the costs of the pension enhancements and health care costs, we have faced similar challenges before and I am certain that we will prevail once again.

Despite the fiscal storm we inherited, the county is headed in the right direction. Working together, we can make Milwaukee County a **safe** place to live, an **affordable** place to raise a family, open a business and retire, and a place we're **proud** to call home, because our quality of life is superior to anywhere else in the country.

Finally, I hope you will join me in working to keep our taxes low and our expectations high. This is a great place, and I'm honored to be able to serve.

Thank you.